

The T-80UK Command Tank

*One out of every 30 T-80s
being built for the Russian Army
is the command tank variant*

by Adam Geibel, © 1997, 1998

The Soviets have habitually created command versions of their standard tanks, a concept predating WWII that has been carried on to their latest MBT, the T-80U (Starting with the T-54A series, command tanks received a 'k' suffix). However, in addition to being a serious link in the communications chain, the 46-ton T-80UK has both offensive and defensive abilities beyond its regular stablemates.

The T-80UK is quite capable of engaging in tank-versus-tank combat, as it is mechanically identical to the standard T-80U in the majority of subsystems (built-in turret ERA, armament, power plant, transmission, running gear, and sights), but internal space needed for the extra radios and other electronics has limited onboard ammunition storage to 30 main gun rounds and 750 rounds of 7.62mm coax.

With production of the T-80U standardized for the Russian Army, every 30th tank taken into service has been outfitted as a T-80UK. These are reserved for regimental and battalion commanders, allowing them direct communications to higher headquarters. Previously, these duties had been handled by the Chief of Staff (in a regimental BMP-1KSh or battalion BMP-1KSh) or the unit staff (in a BTR-60R-145BM).

The most recognizable feature of the T-80UK is its three antennas: two four-meter whip (one UHF, one HF) and one 11-meter telescoping HF/UHF "symmetrical vibrator" antenna. The last is erected on the hull during halts and stowed in a tube over the transmission.

The R-163-U VHF FM radio operates in the 30-80 MHz range and generally uses the tank's four-meter whip antenna. The R-163-K HF radio is intended to support long-range communications when fitted with an 11 meter telescopic antenna and operates in the 1.5-30 MHz band.



The T-80UK carries a selection of supporting command gear; a TNA-4 navigation system (three-position indicator), a plotting board, gyro-compass, control panel, and aiming circle. An AB-1-P28 1.0 kw gasoline power generator (with self-contained power supply) is carried on board in order to charge the batteries during halts when the engine is not running.

In addition to the Shtora-1 electro-optical protection system, the T-80UK is also equipped to fire EhDKV rounds equipped with electronic remote control proximity fuses. Since the battalion and regimental commanders direct the battle from the rear, the Russians feel that their tanks are better suited to engage targets of opportunity that usually require mortars or artillery. EhDKV rounds have a range of 4,000m and can be fired at a rate of four rounds per minute. The T-80UK is also fitted with the AGAVA-2 thermal sight, which has a range of 2,600m.

In addition to the Russian Army, the T-80 is fielded by Belorussia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Syria. In May 1996, Moscow also announced the transfer of 27 T-80U and 14 T-80UKs to the Cypriot National Guard. While the total package might reach just under 100 T-80s, this is still a surprisingly high ratio of command tanks. Furthermore, 33 T-80Us have been supplied to the South Koreans (presumably, there should be at least one T-80UK in this group).